1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
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622 of serious concern to the entire village. If his suggestion is not
692 accepted, or if the matter is of village concern, he may call together the so-called "Five People" (*mõre hoŗ*). The "Five People," obviously homologous with the Hindu *Panchayāt*, actually consist of as many married males from the village as wish to participate. After prolonged discussion, the headman will pronounce what he takes to be the general consensus and will ask if this is not acceptable. According to the traditional way of stating the matter, "all must agree" for a decision to be reached, but this requirement does not quite mean that all must be convinced that the decision is a good one.

• 626 To understand the nature of this consensus, which is an important element in Santal solidarity, one must consider the relation between morality and solidarity in the Santal view. For the traditional Santal, what the "people" say is good and true *is* good and true. Like other peoples, the Santal are not entirely consistent in this matter, but they do regard consensus as the basis of morality. Though the facts of any particular issue must be decided upon the basis of evidence presented, true moral rules are felt to lie in the matrix of the traditional cultural heritage. Thus, when it is a question of deciding what the rules are or ought to be, the "people" ostensibly consult the unwritten records of their tradition.

The Santal are well practiced in giving assent to what appears to be consensus. Thus it is quite proper to move from the minority to the majority viewpoint not because one ought to be accommodating or because one has seen the light, but rather because the voice of the people is the voice of tradition—and since the traditional is sacred, it would not be far wrong to say the voice of the sacred as well.

The practice of readily giving assent to prevailing views

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
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626 which are held to be traditional, sacred, and true is a necessary characteristic of a society where leaders voice consensus rather than promulgate edicts and where there is no specialized police force. Perhaps the Santal are as "tradition-directed" as a society may be. This means that weight is given to tradition in making decisions, but it does not mean, as abundant evidence soon to be presented will indicate, that Santal culture is static. It means rather that the "people," like our Supreme Court, must justify their decisions in terms of real or alleged traditional precepts and practices. As our own historical experience indicates, tradition so interpreted and utilized allows for considerable flexibility. Thus it would probably be more accurate to call Santal society (and possibly other societies known for reverence of the traditional) "tradition-justifying," rather than "tradition-directed."

613 621 776 778 The dominance of a particular local lineage in a village is joined with village solidarity, just as the officials of the village are recruited from this lineage. Every village has its "headman's shrine" (*maṇjhithan*); here as at the "Sacred Grove" the deities are represented by unworked stones. The central deity of this shrine is "Oldman Headman" (*Maṇjhi-Haṛam*), who is the spirit of the founding father of the village, i.e., the first headman. At various ceremonies the headman or priest, accompanied by the villagers, makes offerings to Oldman Headman, who is, of course, of their lineage. By contributions to the offerings to Oldman Headman and by various formal and informal gestures, the villagers both acknowledge the authority of their village officials and participate in commemoration of village solidarity.

621 In some contexts village membership and solidarity are paramount. Fellow villagers must worship together on prescribed

Jt Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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Whatever that may be, a sane admonition is now given to the erring by sensible parents and we understand that even married men are reproached by their parents or superiors if they indulge in adultery.

Santal women, in sexual matters, are the passive type found in the sex in general. If the term 'masochistic' can be applied to such a nature, they are undoubtedly so. We enquired to find out cases of women possessing a sadistic nature and gathered that instances of women beating men for economic reasons or domestic infidelity are not at all rare. But the witnesses stoutly maintained that such cases had nothing to do with the infliction of pain for the joy of it, and women as a sex do never take the lead in coitus or mastery in cohabitation.

But in married-life, should the husband be sexually unsatisfactory and fail habitually to satisfy the cravings of his wife for intercourse, the wife unfailingly sues for divorce and changes the husband for a more capable one. As one Santal puts it, "Failure to satisfy the sexual passion is the primary reason for divorces. Women can stand starvation in food as she can work and earn it, but if the husband fails to be a satisfactory partner in mating, she will leave him immediately."

The place of sex in the tribal life

Any one visiting a Santal rally at a dance or a festival, we dare say, will be struck with the

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being as it is, intimacy is never left unwatched and unquestioned. Their wives and daughters may dance with any Santal at day time, but at night no decent girl will dance except in the company of her father or husband It is only the flirt, the divorcee or the widow who dances unaccompanied by their elders. Some Santals asserted that wives should dance with their husbands only and never with others, but enquiry revealed that custom lays down no such strict injunction and married couples may dance together or with different partners, but there is the sane restriction that the husband must be present at the dancing-yard. It was stated that the husband and wife may suspect each other if either of them dances with others. So business, relationship and bonafides play their reasonable part in determining whether suspicion should attach to the movements of men and women and if the reasons why two persons of the opposite sexes are meeting together are clear, Santal men and women do not bother their heads with any jealous speculation.

Sexual freedom with the Santals has its own border-line. In course of the previous chapters we have seen that the unmarried boy and girl are sexually free, provided that they do not violate the laws of exogamy and prohibited degrees. So it happens that should a lad be found cohabiting, say, with five girls, he will be simply asked by his elders to make

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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836 his choice and marry any of them and not to go so
626 wildly about. Exactly, the same step is taken as regards the unmarried girl. They are not tried or punished, if they do not cross the limits of exogamy but should they do so, the laws, as we have seen, are severe.

837 Faithless partners are dealt in a way peculiar to
626 the Santal. Should the husband of a girl go wrong with unmarried girls or widows, he is taken to task by sensible parents or village-elders; the tribe takes no social notice of the wrong. But the case of a married woman going wrong with others is tried by the village-elders and should the offence be proved, she is divorced and fined.

833 *The Quality of Love*

Some Santals told us that it is nothing unusual for a newly married couple to indulge in coitus for four times daily before the birth of children. Although with age, this diminishes, twice a day remains as the irreducible average for the Santals. Even in his sixtieth year, it is nothing abnormal for the Santal to enjoy sexual intercourse once a day and with a few this capacity does not leave them even at seventy. Regarding the duration of coitus, the majority opinion for twenty minutes to half-an-hour as the minimum average and individual abnormal claim for three hours (by counting time by the

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by their parents. It is no uncommon sight to see a man striding along the road with a carrying pole across his shoulders; in the basket slung from one end he carries some of the family cooking utensils, while the youngest member of the family sits confidently in a basket at the other end. The immediate economic advantage of this annual migration, without which they might be forced to leave their present homes with dire consequences for their tribal stability, is secured at a heavy price. In addition to the toll on their health, tribal sanctions are loosened away from the village. Offenders against the tribal law, runaway brides, women accused of witchcraft, and many others who do not wish to submit to discipline can find a refuge away from their homes, and each year the number of those who elect to stay "east" is growing.

The older generation regard the yearly exodus as the prime cause of moral laxity because it flouts an old taboo. Formerly no Santal was supposed to cross the Damodar river, which forms the northern and eastern boundary of the Bankura district. When at first men were drawn away to work over the river the women were not allowed to accompany them. The reason given for this prohibition was that by crossing the river they would bring misfortune on themselves and their villages. The underlying causes may be connected in part with the fact that the tribal gods are forest gods and could not protect them on the other side of the river, where there are no forests; and partly linked with the fact that the Damodar has an important place in their customs for disposing of the dead.[1] Whatever they be, the old taboo is now ignored.

During the last few days of *Pus* (mid-January) and at each month's end till the Spring festival, parties of men, women and children can be seen returning along the roads in single file, the women always in front. They are bent on reaching their own villages before the festivities which mark the turn of the month. The old people watch for their return and the relieving of their responsibilities. They enjoy greater leisure and may be seen more often squatting on the narrow ledges that surround the houses, sunning themselves. As men and women return from the east they find employment chiefly in felling trees and in carting both wood and leaves to the railway. For many years the traditional attitude of the Santal to the forest has been to make clearings and begin cultivation. The forests of the area are privately owned by the landlords, and they are exploited for their timber.

[1] See Chapter 12, p. 155.

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CHAPTER 5

SOME FOLK-TALES

FOLK-TALES are meant to entertain, and only incidentally do they instruct. The stories current among the Santals do, however, reveal standards of conduct; they hold up certain types of character as admirable, others as ridiculous or contemptible, and so help to form the judgment of their hearers. Over two hundred stories told by Santals are available in English, for this is a field that early attracted the attention of Europeans living among them. The first in the field was the Rev. F. T. Cole, who in 1875 printed two stories in the *Indian Antiquary*. A further collection of tales was published in 1891, collected by the Rev. A. Campbell. The collection of C. H. Bompas, entitled *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*, was published in 1909, and this has remained a standard collection in the West. Bodding's monumental work in three volumes was not published until the years 1925–29. It contains ninety-three stories with Santali text and English translation, and the same plan was followed in his other publications, *A Chapter of Santal Folklore*, which contains ten stories, and *Witchcraft among the Santals*, which contains eight. The editor of this last work, which was published after Bodding's death, states that C. H. Bompas obtained the manuscript of many stories from Bodding.[1]

The field is far from exhausted. All collections that have been published up till now have been gathered either in the Santal Parganas or in the district of Manbhum, except for eleven stories published in a book that deals with the Santals of Mayurbhanj,[2] the extreme south of the Santal country. The tales included here are told in the Bankura district and serve to illustrate the Santal attitude towards many of the facts mentioned in other chapters.

(1) *The Grey Monkey and a Boy*

At the end of a certain bazaar there were a great many trees where lived a band of grey monkeys. Each day one of the

[1] Oslo Ethnographical Museum, *Skrifter Bind* 3, Hefte 3, p. 237: "Years ago most of these tales have been retold from Mr. Bodding's manuscripts by C. H. Bompas in *Folklore of the Santal Parganas* (London, 1909)." For some of the facts in this paragraph I am indebted to an article entitled "The Folk-Tale in Santal Society", by Mildred Archer, *Man in India*, December 1944, Vol. XXIV.

[2] Charulal Mukherjea, *The Santals*, Indian Research Institute, Calcutta, 1943.

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797 The attitude of the community towards the family or the
798 individual who has become Christian is a complex of tolerance
621 and incomprehension. Becoming a Christian is not in itself an
• 626 offence for which there is an established penalty in tribal custom: the village council does not act and there is no formal outcasting of the offender from the community as there is, for example, when a Santal has married outside the tribe. The denial of tobacco and drinking water, two of the common manifestations of "separateness", are rarely used in the area, though sometimes found elsewhere. Thus, in the early days of the mission at Benagaria, Skrefsrud found that Christian converts were being cut off from social intercourse; by a process that sounds very like intimidation he invited all the leading Santals of the neighbourhood to a feast with the converts and informed them that having eaten with the converts they must now receive them back into the tribe.[1] Where social ostracism does occur it does not last long. There is rarely any need for a family to change their residence on becoming Christian so far as their fellow villagers are concerned, though some Christians do so because there are occasions when an isolated Christian family is put to grave inconvenience. This is particularly the case when a death occurs, for
[764] the non-Christians will have nothing whatever to do with the disposal of a corpse after the strange manner of the Christians. Such predicaments occur only when the degree of isolation is great. With the individual convert it happens sometimes that he has to eat his meals separately from the rest of the family
[152] for a time. It is served to him out in the courtyard rather than on the verandah or in the house, but this signifies contempt rather than any other emotion and it does not last. Sometimes the members of the family show signs of genuine grief. There is no
[582] reason, from a Santal point of view, why non-Christian Santals should not marry Christians, although such marriages are not popular. The chief discouragement to them and the only discipline against them is exercised from the Christian side. And while relations between a convert and his kinsfolk and distant relatives do become strained, the old friendly relations are often resumed and it is customary for Christians to pay visits to the homes of non-Christian relations and *vice versa*. No attempt is made to dispossess or disinherit Christians who continue to enjoy the fruits of their toil in the fields.

797 This tolerance of Christians in the midst alongside the dis-
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[1] My authority for this statement is a small life of Skrefsrud in Santali, published by the Santal Mission of the Northern Churches.
[127]

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THE NEW COMMUNITY

From time to time the local Church courts have to consider matters of discipline for moral offences. The only kind of "sanction" that is effective in such cases is a social and economic boycott of the offender by other members of the community. This type of boycott is familiar enough in village life, and the leaders in the Church courts do at times seek to impose it. They are frequently discouraged by the fact that the Christian villager declines to obey the resolution of the meeting in which he doubtless feels he should have a greater voice. The comparative impotence of the Christian community to deal with offenders does encourage moral laxity in certain individuals. The further inference that some offences are more common in one section of the community than in another, or among Christians than among non-Christians, does not follow. When village Christians are themselves faced with the necessity of taking disciplinary action they fall back on tribal practice as nearly as possible. On one occasion a Santal Christian man died at his home about seven miles from Sarenga and the local "catechist" came to ask me to conduct the funeral. This request was unusual, for in the normal way he would have conducted the funeral himself. The dead man, however, had left his home fourteen years before and had lived in the "east" with a non-Christian woman, for which reason his name had been struck off the rolls; so far as the local Christian community was concerned, they understood by this that he was to be to them "as a heathen and a publican". Shortly before he died, knowing himself to be seriously ill, he had desired to return to the scenes of his childhood and he had come back to the home of his aged and widowed mother. The dilemma faced by the local Christians when he died was a very real one. No one else would dispose of the body; but if they did so, how was it consistent with the fact that the man had been thrust out of the community? Unwilling to face the alternatives, they wished me to do so. My advice to the catechist was that he was to carry out the wishes of the majority of the members of the church in the place. Later I learnt that they had decided to make the widowed mother pay a fine of five rupees, a considerable sum for her, and in return they agreed to bury the corpse without holding any prayers over the grave. Half the money was paid to those who dug the grave, and the balance was deposited in the "poor fund" of the local church.

The danger of a cleavage between the leadership and the rank and file can be seen also in the attitude of many of the former to their own language and culture. They have benefited materially